DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 271 960 FL 015 815

TITLE English Teaching Profile: Colombia.
INSTITUTION British Council, London (England). English Language and Literature Div.
PUB DATE May 86
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingual Education; Creative Writing; Educational Administration; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; Instructional Materials; International Cooperation; *Language Role; Postsecondary Education; Research Projects; *Teacher Education; Technical Assistance
IDENTIFIERS *Colombia

ABSTRACT

A review of the status of English language instruction in Colombia provides an overview of the role of English in the society in general and outlines the status of English use and instruction in the educational system at all levels (elementary, secondary, postsecondary, and teacher education). The following topics are covered: the characteristics and training of English language instructors, the type and availability of instructional materials, educational administration and planning in relation to English teaching, English instruction outside the educational system, British and U.S. support for the teaching of English, and commercial opportunities related to English instruction. Although English is the first foreign language of Colombia and is indispensable for business, commerce, professional reading, and advanced studies, it is accorded disappointingly low priority in secondary education and is very poorly taught. However, there is an increasing realization of the importance of improved standards of teacher training as a key to improved teaching and learning. A source of information is provided for further details on this profile. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED271960

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Price

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ENGLISH TEACHING PROFILE

Country: Colombia

Date: May 1986

1. ROLE AND STATUS OF ENGLISH

English is the first foreign language in Colombia but its use is very limited. Its primary use in all sectors is in access to written texts. Written and spoken English are also used, though not frequently, in business and commerce when dealing with foreign clients and visitors. There is an increasing awareness of the importance of English as an international language and therefore as a means of enhancing employment and promotion prospects.

English is the medium of instruction in some subjects in a small number of private bilingual schools; and there is a surprising number of private schools that teach English at primary level even though there is no official requirement. At the tertiary level, English is never used as a medium of instruction. However, most universities run compulsory service English courses, concentrating on reading for academic purposes. University departments of modern languages offer English as a subject for future teachers of languages but, with the exception of Los Andes, no universities offer English as a degree subject in its own right. Hence anyone competent in English or with a good knowledge of British literature and culture will have acquired these outside the university system.

Books written in English, whether literary or otherwise, are difficult to find and expensive to buy. There is a significant demand from university students and teachers for scientific and technical textbooks not yet available in Spanish. Otherwise, only a very small section of the educated community is likely to read books in English, though they may read British literature in translation. Local authors do not write in English but specialist periodicals (for example the Sunday supplements) occasionally contain articles about British authors and their books.

© The British Council, London 1986

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the permission of the British Council, 10 Spring Gardens, London SW1A 2BN, UK.

FL 015815

2. ENGLISH WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

English is not accorded any priority within the education system and there seems to be no foreign language policy for the secondary school curriculum. Decisions as to whether English is to be the only foreign language taught or whether it should share a place with French, the number of hours and for how many years it is to be taught are the results of external political pressures, and not educational considerations.

In June 1979, following the then President's visit to France, a decree was issued making English compulsory during the first two years, and French compulsory during the last two years, of secondary school. In the middle two years, English or French were optional. In 1984, a further decree made it possible for schools to teach only one language during the whole six-year cycle and most schools selected English rather than French as the one obligatory language. In 1985, and weeks before a visit by the French president, a new decree reinstated the 1979 decree.

In September 1980, the Curriculum Section of the Ministry of Education issued a new syllabus for English in the secondary cycle which emphasized reading skills. In practice this syllabus has not proved appropriate to the needs of secondary school students and has not been fully implemented. The Ministry does not prescribe textbooks; the choice is left to schools, and often to individual teachers. About half the students have no English textbook and so teachers use exercises from a variety of sources. An Inspectorate of Languages within the Ministry makes sporadic visits to schools; their powers appear to be minimal and their interests administrative rather than pedagogic.

Promotion from one year to another within the secondary system is by passing all examinations in all subjects; at the end of the sixth year, students must pass the examinations that make up the Certificate of Secondary Education (bachillerato) which is generally accorded GCE O-level status. All these examinations are internal, although the bachillerato examinations have to be moderated by another school also authorized by the Ministry of Education to award the bachillerato. A few bilingual schools also enter their abler pupils for the London University GCE, UCLES (University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate) and IB (International Baccalaureat) examinations. Students who wish to apply for university must, in addition to the bachillerato examinations, take the university entrance examination set by the Institute for Higher Education (ICFES) which includes an English paper. Many universities also have their own required entrance examination.

The level of knowledge of English of a school-leaver depends on the type of school attended. In bilingual schools, the level is generally equivalent to that of the Cambridge First Certificate. In other schools, it is much lower and, in many cases, non-existent since English is often not taught beyond the end of the fourth year of the secondary school.

As already noted, English is offered as a degree subject only in Los Andes University. Otherwise it is offered at some twenty universities as a subject on the four-year initial teacher training degree course in Modern Languages and Education. This BEd (licenciatura) degree is the recognized professional qualification for secondary school teachers. The licenciatura programme includes the study of English and/or French and/or Spanish, linguistics, and educational theory. The emphasis is almost entirely on theory. It is common for literature to be a component of the programme. However, 'literature' courses tend to be introductory courses to American authors and, to a lesser extent, British authors.

In-service teacher training of secondary school teachers of English is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and short 90-hour courses are offered twice a year in most parts of the country. The Ministry of Education's Instituto Electrónico de Idiomas (IEI) produces the course materials, co-ordinates the courses, and selects and trains the teacher trainers who run the courses. In the regions, these courses are organized by local in-service training centres, Centros Experimentales Pilotos, often with the help of the regional university. The IEI also provides English classes for government employees and the general public.

Most universities have a Service English Section which is part of the Modern Languages Department (if the university has one). This Section provides compulsory courses for students from other Departments and the courses concentrate on academic reading. Some Service English Sections provide only broad courses aimed at students of all disciplines; others provide more specialized courses.

Locally produced English courses are broadcast as part of the National Radio's bachillerato by radio and correspondence programmes and, from time to time, other radio stations make use of the BBC English teaching programmes. There is considerable interest in the BBC's television courses, but these are too expensive for purchase by the government or private television companies.

3. TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

Almost all teachers of English (5,000-6,000 at secondary level and 500 at tertiary level) are Colombian. Probably only half of those teaching at secondary schools have the licenciatura degree and most have a level of English well below that of the Cambridge Preliminary English Test. At tertiary level all teachers have the licenciatura degree and as many as 50% have postgraduate training in the UK or USA. Their standard of English tends to be higher than that of their colleagues in secondary schools.

There are few native speakers of English on the staff of Language Departments at either secondary or tertiary level. The situation is slightly better than it was some years ago as, since 1984, twelve to fifteen Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges (CBEVE) English Language Assistants have been placed in schools and universities in Bogotá and elsewhere in the country. Though the Assistants are students, not trained teachers, they do make a valuable contribution to English teaching especially in the remoter provincial cities.

One Technical Co-operation Training Award is set aside each year for secondary school teachers of English and, through CBEVE, a further twelve to fifteen English teachers per year are able to spend one year in Britain as Spanish Language Assistants. Otherwise, because of the very high cost of airfares, secondary school teachers are rarely able to attend conferences and vacation courses abroad. Many, however, attend the official in-service courses because these provide credits which qualify them for a rise on the pay scale.

Annually, three to five Technical Co-operation Training Awards are offered to teachers from the tertiary sector. As with their secondary school colleagues, teachers at university level find it almost impossible to afford conferences and short courses outside the country. Within Colombia the only in-service facility at this level is provided by short seminars or courses funded by the British Council or Overseas Development Administration (ODA).

There is scope for increased British activity in teacher training but British resources (unlike those of the French government) are limited. A KELT project on initial teacher training is under consideration.

The National Association of Teachers of English in Colombia (ASOCOPI) is the only professional association of its kind in the country. Members come from both secondary and tertiary levels. The Association is organized on a regional basis, but has a national Board which is elected every year at the Annual Congress. The Board includes one person who is responsible for producing the Association's quarterly journal HOW which receives financial support from the British Council. The Association has the potential to be an effective organization and it is so from time to time, but all depends upon the energy and commitment of its regional and national representatives.

4. MATERIALS SUPPORT

Most schools and universities are not adequately supplied with textbooks, supplementary readers, literary texts (originals, simplified or abridged), and other English teaching material. This is partly because of the local scarcity of such materials and because the imported materials available are very expensive. There are virtually no public libraries; and institutional libraries, where they exist, have poor collections of books in English. Only a handful of local bookshops carry a stock of books in English; and only one, Libreria Aldina, carries a stock that is mainly in English.

Materials in use at secondary schools include Conquest, Express it in English, Odyssey, Lado English Series, and I Love English. Oxford University Press recently negotiated an agreement with a local distributor, Ediciones Cruz del Sur Ltda, and Longmans (Great Britain) are negotiating with Educar Editores. An increasing number of British ELT textbooks will be available locally.

At tertiary level a variety of texts are used, both published and locally produced by the teaching staff. This applies to the ESP (reading for academic purposes) as well as to the General English courses in the licenciatura programme.

Commercially produced audio and video materials are used but not widely. The two constraining factors are price and availability. One company, Epsilon, currently has an arrangement with BBC to produce and sell Follow Me; this video-audio package is very expensive but sales to companies and institutions have been encouraging. There is a good potential market for video and audio materials if they are made available at a reasonable price.

Both British and American literature are available in translation, particularly the classics and popular modern fiction.

5. EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN RELATION TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

The Ministry of National Education, which was restructured in 1976, is headed by the Minister, Vice-Minister, and Secretary General. It consists of many Divisions grouped under Offices (Planning; Legal; and International Relations) and Directorates (Administration and Inspection; Administrative Services; and Teacher Training, Curriculum Development and Educational Resources). The Directorate of Teacher Training, Curriculum Development and Educational

Resources is responsible for convening the committees which draw up the curricula at primary and secondary levels. This Directorate includes a Division which controls the Centros Experimentales Pilotos and this Division, in turn, has responsibility for the Instituto Electrónico de Idiomas (IEI). The IEI, as mentioned earlier, is responsible for the planning of all in-service training for serving teachers of English and French and for providing English and French classes for civil servants and the general public in Bogotá. The IEI also produces and evaluates the secondary school syllabuses for English and French. However, despite its direct concern with language teaching in the schools, the IEI is not necessarily asked to join the curriculum review committees nor consulted when there is a change affecting the foreign language provision at secondary level. Though the Ministry has a central role in promoting, developing, and controlling education, responsibility for implementing and financing the sytem is devolved to regional educational authorities.

6. DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

Before Independence the provision for education was largely a matter of private, religious initiative. In 1844, after Independence, basic aspects of education were clarified, new methods introduced and many pedagogical, teaching and administrative principles established. Since then several other reforms have been introduced. The present system, shown on the chart, was established in 1976.

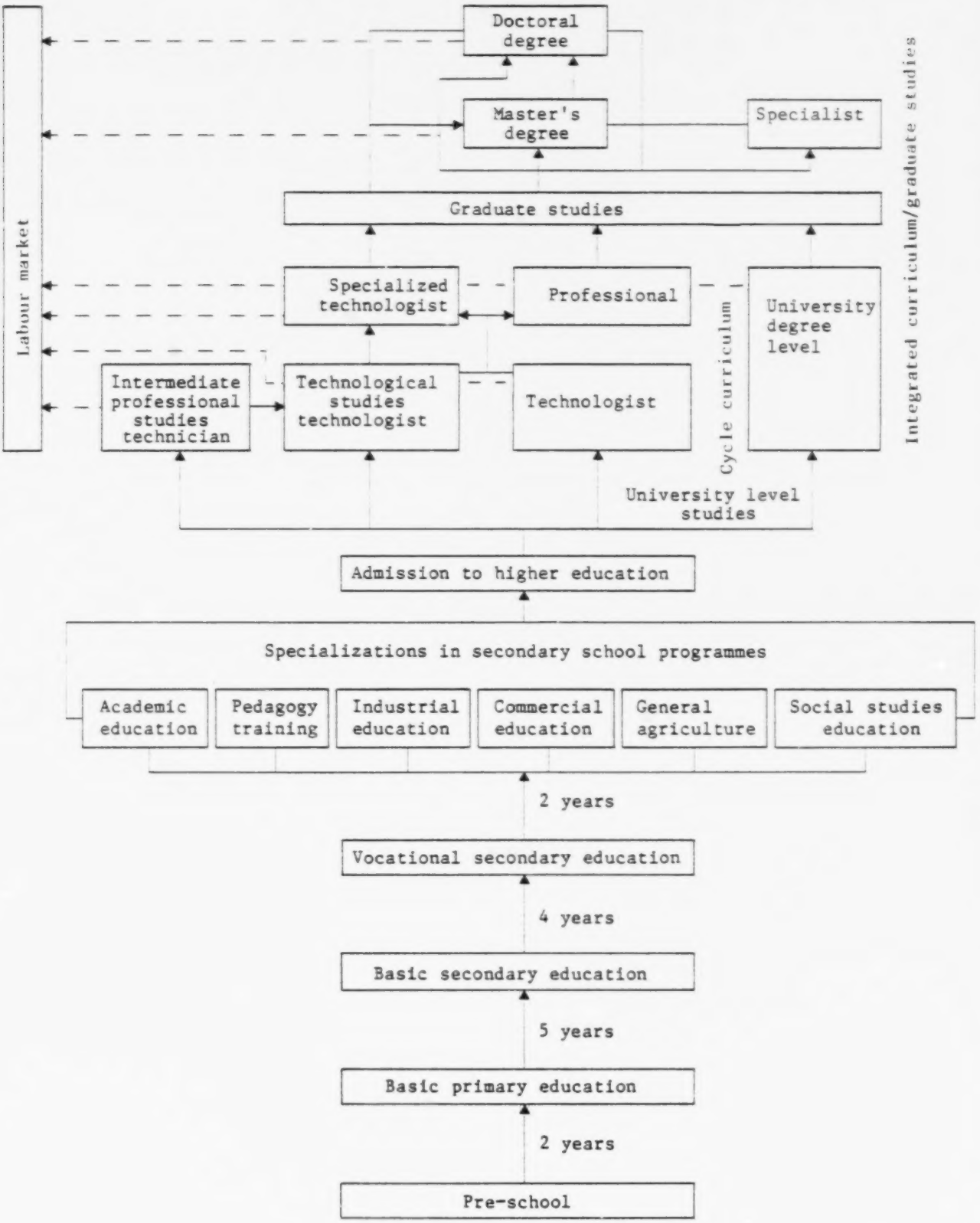
Education is free and compulsory from the ages of 7 to 11, i.e. for the five-year basic primary cycle. In practice there are not enough primary schools and therefore a significant, but undeclared, percentage of children in the age group receive no primary education. There is a similar shortfall in the provision for secondary education, about fifty percent of which is private. It seems likely that only about half the primary school population moves on to secondary. The shortage of secondary places is reflected in the fact that schools in urban areas often run two or three 'shifts' to accommodate all those in the catchment area who have successfully completed their primary education. The secondary private sector ranges from the very prestigious bilingual schools through to part-time crammer-type institutions.

The secondary school curriculum is laid down by committees convened by the Minister of Education. There have been several reforms in recent years mainly aimed at creating an education system which is less dependent upon rote learning and memorization. However, the Ministry does not have the human or financial resources to implement such (much needed) reforms and to provide for the necessary in-service training of teachers; nor does the Ministry have the channels to university teacher training departments to ensure that patterns of initial teacher training are modified.

As mentioned in Section 5, the Colombian education system is decentralized. Each region and the District of Bogotá has its own Secretary of Education who has direct responsibility for and control of schools in the region/district. All senior appointments in the Ministry, the District of Bogotá and the regions are political. Thus, whenever there is a change of Minister of Education, Mayor of Bogotá or Regional Governor, all the senior personnel involved in education are also likely to change. Therefore, encumbents of educational posts do not necessarily have background experience of and interest in education. This patronage can extend to teaching posts which are, in the poorer regions, often given as a reward to loyal followers. Such nominees often do not go near their schools.

During 1982-6 the Ministry of Education changed hands four times and one important product of these changes was that two quite contradictory decrees affecting the provision of foreign languages in the secondary curriculum were issued within eighteen months of each other. Long-term educational planning at secondary level, whether in respect of the teaching of English or any other subject, is not possible within the framework of Colombia's civil service as presently constituted.

Structure of the education system in Colombia



Tertiary level education is controlled by ICFES (Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educacion Superior). This Institute for Higher Education is roughly the equivalent to the University Grants Committee in the UK. It has the power to authorize and inspect all degree courses offered by all universities, except the Universidad Nacional. There is no standardization of programmes and therefore the standard and quality of courses offered, including the licenturia degree in modern languages, vary greatly from university to university.

7. ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

In Bogotá and the other cities and towns of Colombia there are numerous commercial language schools offering English courses for adults and, increasingly, for children. The teachers are for the most part Colombian though a few native speakers are also employed. Some of the schools, e.g. the Winston Salem, the Meyer Institute and Interlingua offer their own introductory teacher training courses. The Berlitz School is the only one which has an overseas parent body. These schools all offer general English courses; some also offer business English and one, the Meyer Institute, offers bilingual secretarial training. None offers literature courses.

An increasing number of schools both in Bogotá and the major provincial cities advertise themselves as being bilingual. This usually means that they teach English throughout the primary and secondary cycles and not that they offer English-medium education.

In several prestigious bilingual schools English is used as a medium of instruction for some subjects at secondary level:

Colegio Anglo-Colombiano Fundación Colegio de Inglaterra (The English School) Colegio Nueva Granada Colegio San Jorge de Inglaterra	Bogotá
Colegio Colombo-Británico Colegio Colombo-Americano	Cali
Colegio Colombo-Americano	Medellín

In these schools the study of British and/or American literature is included in the curriculum.

8. BRITISH SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

There is an English Language Officer on the staff of the British Council in Bogotá. The Key English Language Teaching (KELT) Project at the IEI ceased in April 1986, and there are no other Council-employed or Council-sponsored ELT staff working outside the Council centre.

Twelve to fifteen British students work as English Language Assistants in a number of schools and universities in Bogotá and elsewhere in the country. Also, a few British teachers of English are employed at the major bilingual schools. Some of the local language schools employ British teachers from time to time.

The British Council Direct Teaching of English Operation (DTEO), housed in the same building as the main Council office, in Bogotá, has expanded considerably since it opened in 1981. There are now (May 1986) some 950 students enrolled and sixteen British EFL qualified staff: Director of Studies (1); Assistant Director of Studies (1); full-time teachers (7); part-time teachers (7).

The main demand is for general English, but literature and business English courses have been held and will be held again if there is sufficient demand. The Council has a library of some 8,000 volumes of which approximately 2,000 are EFL reference and textbooks. Cultural activities, e.g. feature and documentary films, music recitals, lectures, etc. are held at the British Council office twice a week. These events are attended by DTEO students as well as members of the general public. Attendance at cultural events varies (50-150 people).

The first ESP Conference in Latin America was held in Colombia in 1977. Since then there have been regular (two to four per year) ELT short courses and seminars run by British specialists for national rather than international audiences.

The only British teaching materials in wide use are those used in the Council DTEO: the Strategies series (Longman); Meaning into Words (Cambridge University Press); Progress to First Certificate (Cambridge University Press); Advanced Speaking/Writing Skills (Longman); Themes for Proficiency (Oxford University Press); Video English (British Council/Macmillan).

9. AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

The Americans have two Centros Colombo-Americanos in Bogotá catering for approximately 5,000 adult students as well as eight centres throughout the country. In Bogotá, less than half the staff are American or native speakers of English. In the provincial centres the percentage is much smaller.

Though the United States Information Service (USIS) gives some support to the Centros this is mainly directed towards the library and information services which the Centros offer. Until 1985 the Director of the Centros was a Washington-appointed member of the USIS ELT cadre staff; he has been replaced by a locally engaged Director. The Centros Colombo-Americanos concentrate on general English courses; they also offer bilingual secretarial training and courses in literature, and culture and civilization. Relations between the Americans and British in ELT are close. In addition to regular informal contact throughout the year, the British participate in the Annual ELT Seminar which the main Bogotá Centro arranges for Centro staff throughout the country and teachers from schools and universities in Bogotá.

The Fulbright Commission offers a few postgraduate awards for Colombians to study TEFL or Applied Linguistics in the States. Very occasionally Americans are appointed under the Fulbright scheme to work in ELT in Colombia.

10. OTHER AGENCY SUPPORT

None.

11. COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

There is no doubt a large commercial potential for British ELT materials including audio and video (Betamax NTSC format) cassettes. British publishers interested in developing the Colombian market have encountered import, distribution and pricing problems. However, there are indications that these can be overcome as demonstrated by Oxford University Press's recent agreement with a local agent/distributor.

There is a demand for the UCLES ELT examinations from the bilingual schools and, to a much smaller extent, from DTEO students. The bilingual schools also enter candidates for the Trinity College ELT examinations. In the last year (1985-6) the pound sterling has risen dramatically and the cost of British examinations has become very high causing a fall in the number of candidates entering the examinations.

There is no demand for British consultancy services in ELT though there are frequent enquiries about teacher recruitment from the UK. The headmasters of the three major British-type bilingual schools make annual recruitment trips to Britain and at least one of the schools uses the services of Gabbitas Thring.

The British Council receives many enquiries about English language courses in Britain. Most Colombians who study English in Britain do so as part of a package deal with airline companies or travel agencies.

One language school, EF, has set up its own office in Bogotá; the viability of this as a commercial venture has not yet been established.

12. CREATIVE WRITING

None.

13. CURRENT RESEARCH

Small research projects of a theoretical nature are carried out by staff in the Universidad del Valle in Cali and staff at other major universities as part of the university's requirement for them to publish 'Obras Intelectuales'; but none of the universities offers any real opportunities for postgraduate study in English language and literature or for the establishment of research projects or investigations in relation to the teaching of English.

14. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

Further detailed information about sections of this Profile can be obtained from:

The English Language Officer
El Consejo Británico
Calle 87 No 12-79
Apartado Aéreo 089231
Bogotá
Colombia
South America

15. GENERAL STATEMENT

Given the widespread recognition of the fact that English is indispensable for business, commerce, professional reading and advanced studies it is disappointing that the teaching of English is not accorded higher priority in the secondary curriculum and that it is, generally speaking, so badly taught. However, there is an increasing realization that the key to improved teaching and learning is improvement in the standards of teacher training at both initial and in-service stages. Provision for the latter has been much improved and systematized by the presence of a KELT adviser in the IEI. With the departure of the KELT adviser, care must be taken to ensure that achieved standards are maintained. The initial teacher training provision is too theoretical and universities are now considering what changes are needed to provide a realistic and effective training for teachers of EFL. A KELT Project in this area is under consideration.